

4/5/2005 9:31 AM

Summary and Actions Taken Since March 14, 2005 Anthrax Incident
Before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations

Statement of John N. Jester, Director
Pentagon Force Protection Agency

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to discuss the emergency response activities to the suspected anthrax contamination at the Pentagon's Defense Post Office (DPO) and at a mail office in Skyline Tower 5. In addition to a brief summary of events, I also plan on sharing with the Committee lessons learned and actions taken since the event. Overall, I want to reassure the Committee that the Pentagon is an equal partner with federal, state and local entities in protecting the health and safety of our employees and the surrounding communities. As a way of introduction, I am John N. Jester, Director of the Pentagon Force Protection Agency. We are responsible for the protection of the people, facilities, and infrastructure on the Pentagon Reservation. We perform a mission very similar to the U.S. Capitol Police.

SUMMARY

To briefly summarize the recent events; on Thursday, March 10, Vistronix, a U.S. Army contractor, screened mail entering the Defense Post Office over down-draft tables. Swab samples off the filters under the tables were collected and sent to the Commonwealth Biotechnology Incorporated Laboratory, hereafter, referred to as the CBI Lab. Standard procedures call for the contractor to hold the mail in quarantine for three days until the lab reports negative results.

At 4:00pm on Friday, March 11, representatives from the CBI Lab informed the Vistronix site supervisor that the initial test result of Thursday's mail sample would be delayed due to a preliminary positive test result. The Vistronix supervisor did not inform DoD of this preliminary test result. Over the weekend, CBI performed a confirmation test on the sample.

On Monday morning, March 14, at 6:15am, Vistronix released Thursday's mail to the Defense Post Office for distribution. Three hours later, the CBI Lab informed the Vistronix site supervisor that test results from one of the swab samples from Thursday's mail resulted in a positive response for anthrax.

The Defense Post Office was notified of the positive test result, immediately shut down their facility, and notified PFPA. In the two hours that followed, we established a secure perimeter around the RDF, notified Arlington County, and set up an incident command post integrating local and federal emergency response efforts. 236 employees from the RDF were evacuated to a nearby vacant building until they could be briefed, tested, issued precautionary treatment, and offered counseling services. We coordinated with other Pentagon distribution offices, identified all possible recipients of the morning mail, and deployed HAZMAT teams to these sites for additional swab sample tests.

4/5/2005 9:31 AM

Between 10am and 1pm, PFPA notified local, state and federal emergency response agencies of the potential biohazard incident through the Washington Area Warning System. By 1pm the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Homeland Security Operations Center, and the Office of the Post Master General were all notified.

Arlington County Fire Department arrived at the Pentagon at 11:04am and the FBI was on the scene by 1:00pm. Over the next three days, Pentagon officials coordinated with local, state and federal health and law enforcement agencies to coordinate response and communication efforts.

At approximately 2:00pm, we were notified that a bio-alarm was set off in a mail distribution office in Skyline 5. An officer was dispatched and requested assistance from Fairfax County, who responded and took over incident command. It was later determined that the room in question did not have a biosensor or bio-alarm. The device was a biological air filtration hood and the alarm was a red light indicating an airflow restriction.

All subsequent tests returned negative and the Skyline complex and RDF reopened on Thursday, March 17. By Thursday, March 17, the DiLorenzo Clinic in the Pentagon tested more than 800 people through nasal swabs and provided three days of antibiotics. Daily communication occurred with Pentagon employees to keep them informed of progress.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

As in any emergency, there were actions that went very well and procedures that need to be improved. Our initial after-action assessments identified some positive aspects of the collective Pentagon response to this incident. The Remote Delivery Facility, as designed, kept potentially harmful substances isolated from the large Pentagon population. We immediately identified and screened potentially contaminated employees. Within 3 hours, our organic HAZMAT team completed 130 tests of the mailroom and other suspected areas.

As a result of an interagency conference between DoD, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, CDC, the FBI and local authorities, a decision was made to advise, counsel, and treat several hundred postal service employees who handled the mail prior to its delivery to the Pentagon.

Not everything transpired, as it should have. It took too long for the original contractor lab mail results to be processed and the contractor staff failed to follow mail release procedures. Additionally, there was no way to confirm that all local, state and federal agencies heard the Washington Area Warning System message. The event illustrated that incidents at high profile symbolic federal facilities become breaking news stories and are quickly perceived as national events.

CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

We have already taken major steps to address these issues. Since the suspected anthrax incident, PFPA has assumed responsibility for oversight of the mail screening process and testing the samples from the filters at our Pentagon Laboratory. The on-site lab provides a 24-hour response

4/5/2005 9:31 AM

for positive initial screening (or presumptive test) of multiple threat agents. PFPA will ensure the mail is properly quarantined until the Pentagon Lab returns negative sample test results.

Revised notifications, both interagency and external, are in place for future chem./bio events. Our procedures for using the Washington Area Warning System now include a preamble with an emergency message stating the “who, what, where, and when” of the event. We will ensure that a response is received from appropriate agencies such as DHS, FBI and local counties. In 30 to 45 seconds the emergency message will be repeated.

In addition to a number of after action reviews, a thorough review and assessment of the DoD response to, and management of, the incidents is being conducted. DoD will receive a draft after-action report in 21 days and a final report within 45 days.

The Pentagon is fortunate to have excellent working relationships with Arlington and Fairfax County’s fire and police departments. These working relationships were tested and proven on 9/11 and continue to improve as we participate in annual exercises.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. Thank you for the opportunity to speak and I will be happy to answer any questions that you or the Committee Members might have.